

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PARIS 11015 01 OF 03 040902Z
ACTION EUR-12

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 11015

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: A JOURNALIST ASSESSES THE POST-ELECTION PERIOD

SUMMARY. RADIO AND TV EDITORIALIST ALAIN DUHAMEL IS ONE OF THE MORE PERCEPTIVE ANALYSTS OF THE MEANDERINGS OF FRENCH POLITICS AND A MAN WHO MANAGES TO KEEP IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL HOUSE, FROM GISCARD TO THE HIERARCHY OF THE PCF (HE CO-AUTHORED WITH JACQUES FAUVET, EDITOR OF LE MONDE, A HISTORY OF THE PCF). DUHAMEL RATES GISCARD AND THE UDF THE BIG WINNERS IN THE ELECTIONS, THE RPR AND PCF MODEST LOSERS AND THE PS MORE OF A QUESTION MARK. HE WOULD GIVE GISCARD A FAIR CHANCE TO SUCCEED IN MAKING THE UDF AN EFFECTIVE VEHICLE FOR GATHERING IN THE MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC WHICH PLACES ITSELF SOMEWHERE IN THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, BUT HE WARNS THAT THE PROCESS WILL BE MUCH MORE GRADUAL (PERHAPS 10 YEARS) THAN MOST PEOPLE THOUGHT. END SUMMARY.

1. PCF A NET LOSER: DUHAMEL HARPED ON THE FACT THAT THE
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PAGE 02 PARIS 11015 01 OF 03 040902Z

PCF IS NOW THE FOURTH PARTY IN THE COUNTRY (RATHER THAN THE SECOND PARTY) IN TERMS OF ASSEMBLY SEATS AND POPULAR VOTE. AND THE PARTY HAS EVERY CHANCE OF REPEATING THIS PERFORMANCE IN THE 1981 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, CONFIRMING ITS STALLED OR FALTERING POSITION. DUHAMEL ALSO ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE TREND OF THE PCF VOTE OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS: 27-28 PERCENT AFTER WORLD WAR II, 25

PERCENT DURING THE COLD WAR YEARS AND 20-21 PERCENT SINCE DETENTE. THE SLOPE HAS ALWAYS BEEN DOWN. THE FACT THAT THE PCF WON 12 ADDITIONAL SEATS LAST MONTH WAS DUE MORE TO LOCAL AND REGIONAL FACTORS AND DOES NOT AMOUNT TO A CHANGE BIG ENOUGH TO ALTER ITS POWER POSITION VIS-A-VIS EITHER THE PS OR THE MAJORITY.

2. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PCF: DUHAMEL BELIEVES THE ODDS ARE GREATLY AGAINST THE PARTY BEING ABLE TO REVERSE THIS TREND. THE SOCIOLOGY OF FRANCE IS AGAINST SUCH A SWITCH. THE SWING VOTE IN THE CENTER, FOR INSTANCE, WHICH AMOUNTED TO ABOUT 4 PERCENT LAST MONTH AND SHOULD INCREASE IN THE FUTURE, TURNED ITS BACK ON THE LEFT THIS TIME AND, WHEN IN DOUBT, FAVORED THE UDF. RELUCTANCE BY SOCIALIST VOTERS TO SUPPORT COMMUNIST CANDIDATES ON THE SECOND ROUND ONLY COMPLICATED THE PCF'S TASK. AT THE SAME TIME, DUHAMEL PREDICTED, THE PS WILL BE MOST CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS NEWLY-ACQUIRED CREDENTIALS ON THE LEFT. THE PS' EVOLUTION TOWARD A LESS DOCTRINAIRE PARTY WILL BE PAINFULLY SLOW, IN ORDER NOT TO ALLOW ANY VOID TO BE CREATED ON THE LEFT AND FILLED BY ITS PCF COMPETITOR. DUHAMEL ADMITTED THAT HIS WORKING ASSUMPTION WAS THAT THE FRENCH ECONOMY WILL CONTINUE TO HOLD ITS OWN, AT LEAST IN COMPARISON TO ITS NEIGHBORS (GERMANY EXCLUDED). IF THE ECONOMY TOOK A DOWN-TURN, OF COURSE, THE PCF WHICH DID BEST IN THE MARCH ELECTIONS IN THE REGIONS MOST SEVE-

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 11015 01 OF 03 040902Z

RELY HIT BY UNEMPLOYMENT (NORD/PAS-DE-CALAIS, THE RHONE VALLEY AND MARSEILLE AREA) WOULD BE THERE TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION.

3. DUHAMEL SEES THE KEY TO PCF'S FUTURE POLICY IN ITS TACTICS OF THE LAST SIX MONTHS. EVEN AFTER THE SPLIT IN THE LEFT LAST SEPTEMBER, THE PCF KEPT ITS OPTIONS OPEN UNTIL VERY LATE -- FEBRUARY, IN HIS OPINION. UNTIL THEN, THE PCF HAD REALISTIC HOPES OF HITTING 22 PERCENT IN THE MARCH VOTE AND ONLY GRADUALLY REACHED THE CONCLUSIONS THAT THE SPREAD BETWEEN THE PS AT ABOUT 27 PERCENT AND ITSELF WAS UNTOLERABLE. DUHAMEL BELIEVES THAT THE PCF, WITH EVEN LESS PRESSURE ON IT NOW THAN DURING THE CAMPAIGN, WILL CONTINUE TO KEEP ITS OPTIONS OPEN BUT THAT IT WILL BE FORCED DOWN THE EUROCOMMUNISM PATH, WHETHER IT LIKES IT OR NOT. SOCIOLOGICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS WILL PARTLY EXPLAIN THIS PHENOMENON. THE MORE RELAXED POST-ELECTION ATMOSPHERE, MAKING GRASS-ROOTS MILITANCY AND MOBILIZATION MORE DIFFICULT, WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THIS DIRECTION. FOR DUHAMEL, CHARLES FITERMAN'S LONG ANALYSIS OF LEFT FAILURE TO PCF FEDERATION HEADS ON MARCH 29 WAS MORE DEFENSIVE THAN HIS SPEECHES DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 PARIS 11015 02 OF 03 040905Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 PARIS 11015

DUHAMEL EXPECTS INCREASED PCF CRITICISM OF THE USSR ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, IN THE PAST THE EASIEST TARGET FOR FRENCH COMMUNISTS AND LIKELY TO BE THE FIRST AREA CHOSEN IN THEIR OPENNESS CAMPAIGN. COMMENT: WHILE OUR INTERLOCUTOR HAS SOME CONVINCING REASONS TO ARGUE FOR A LIBERALIZATION OF THE PCF, WE WOULD BE MORE RESERVED IN GOING THAT FAR. SEE PARIS 10820 FOR A FULLER ANALYSIS OF PCF'S POLICY CHOICES. DUHAMEL'S THEORY IS BUILT ON MANY UNPROVABLE ASSUMPTIONS, AND EVEN IF HIS ASSUMPTIONS PROVE CORRECT, THE PCF CANNOT BE COUNTED ON TO REACT IN WHAT ONE WOULD NORMALLY CONSIDER A LOGICAL WAY.

4. RPR DIFFICULTIES: THE RPR HAS FAR LESS ROOM FOR MANEUVER THAN BEFORE, DUHAMEL SAID. IT IS NOT SO MUCH THAT IT LOST 20 SOME SEATS, BUT IT HAS LOST THE INITIATIVE TO GISCARD. PARTICULARLY CHAGRINING TO THE RPR WAS ITS RELATIVELY POOR ELECTORAL SHOWING IN THE WORKING CLASS AREAS OF PARIS AND THE NORTH, AFTER HAVING CLAIMED FOR SO MANY

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 11015 02 OF 03 040905Z

YEARS THAT IT IS THE ONLY POPULAR MOVEMENT IN THE MAJORITY. CONTRARY TO RPR CLAIMS, ITS PARTY HAS FEWER NEW, YOUNG DEPUTIES THAN EITHER THE PS OR UDF. TO COMPLICATE MATTERS FOR THE RPR, CHIRAC HAS JUST MADE HIS FIRST BIG MISTAKE SINCE FOUNDING THE RFR IN 1976 BY ENCOURAGING CHABAN-DELMAS TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY, THEN SWITCHING TO EDGAR FAURE AND FINALLY ENDING UP WITH TWO CANDIDATES WHO HAVE FORCED THE PARTY TO SPLIT OVER THE CHOICE. A SECOND MISTAKE, IN DUHAMEL'S OPINION, WAS ANNOUNCING A TARGET OF 30 PERCENT FOR THE RPR BY THE 1981 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. DUHAMEL SAYS THIS TARGET IS UNREALISTIC, PARTICULARLY IF CHIRAC IS FACED WITH GISCARD AS HIS PREDICTABLE COMPETITOR. DUHAMEL SAID THE RPR WILL CONTINUE, HOWEVER, TO PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE ASSEMBLY AND IN THE COUNTRY. IT IS BY FAR THE BEST-OILED MACHINE IN THE MAJORITY, AND CHIRAC THE BEST ADVISED LEADER. ITS CAMPAIGN IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS WAS A MODEL OF SMOOTH ORGANIZATION, CLEVER CHOICE OF ISSUES AND EFFECTIVE USE OF THE MEDIA.

5. GISCARD AND THE UDF: GISCARD'S GOAL HAS BEEN THE SAME FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS: TO ASSEMBLE A GROUP OF POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH REFLECT THE MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORATE WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY CENTRIST. THE PRESIDENT, DUHAMEL SAID, HAS COME A FEW STEPS CLOSER TO THAT GOAL THROUGH A COMBINATION OF LUCK AND ACCURATE ANALYSIS. HE WAS ENORMOUSLY HELPED BY THE PS/PCF SPLIT IN SEPTEMBER, BY THE PCF DECISION SOMETIME BEFORE MARCH THAT NOW WAS NOT THE TIME TO COME TO POWER AND BY THE SURPRISINGLY GOOD SHOWING OF THE UDF IN MARCH. AFTER THREE YEARS OF GAFES, DUHAMEL CONTINUED, GISCARD CAN'T SEEM TO DO WRONG. HE EXPLAINS THE EARLIER GAP IN COMPREHENSION BETWEEN VGE AND HIS CRITICS BY A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE TIME-FRAME

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PAGE 03 PARIS 11015 02 OF 03 040905Z

GISCARD HAD IN MIND. MOST PEOPLE EXPECTED QUICK RESULTS AFTER 1974, WHILE NOW WE KNOW GISCARD WAS THINKING OF A 10-YEAR EVOLUTION. THIS LONGER PERIOD IS NECESSARY BECAUSE GISCARD'S IDEA OF POLITICAL ALTERNANCE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE CENTER IS ABOUT A DECADE AHEAD OF PRESENT BLOC VERSUS BLOC REALITIES IN FRANCE. DUHAMEL DESCRIBES GISCARD AS AN AMERICAN LIBERAL WHO, GIVEN A FEW BREAKS, HAS A FAIR CHANCE OF SUCCESSFULLY LEADING HIS COUNTRY DOWN THE ROAD OF PEACEFUL REFORM. COMMENT: WE ARE ALSO SURPRISED THAT THE UDF HAS DONE SO WELL, IN THE ELECTIONS AND SUBSEQUENTLY. HARDLY ANYBODY EXPECTED THIS FEDERATION, SLAPPED TOGETHER A FEW WEEKS

CONFIDENTIAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 PARIS 11015

BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION ON THE ELECTORATE OR LAST LONG AFTER MARCH. BUT IT STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE VEHICLE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM. IT ADMITS TO HAVING NO NATIONAL ORGANIZATION YET, NO MILITANTS AND, ASIDE FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM, NO IDENTITY OF ITS OWN. WE HAVE ALREADY HEARD GRUMBLING FROM MEMBERS OF THE INDIVIDUAL COMPONENT PARTIES THAT THEIR PARTIES ARE BECOMING SUBMERGED IN THE UDF AND RUN THE RISK OF LOSING SUPPORT TO THE RPR OR PS.

6. ELECTION POST-MORTEM: DUHAMEL WAS LESS CRITICAL OF POLLSTERS THAN OTHERS HAVE BEEN. HE FEELS THE LEFT REALLY WAS THE STRONG FAVORITE UNTIL THE LAST FEW DAYS PRECEDING THE FIRST ROUND. FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, HE SAID, WAS ALSO CONVINCED THE LEFT WOULD WIN ON THE FIRST ROUND. HIS WHOLE ELECTORAL TACTIC WAS BUILT ON A STRONG PS SHOWING IN THE POPULAR VOTE, WHICH WOULD HAVE FORCED THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PARIS 11015 03 OF 03 040905Z

PCF TO DESIST ON THE SECOND ROUND TO AVOID THE ONUS OF SABOTAGING A LEFT VICTORY. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND, HOWEVER, THE SWING VOTE IN THE CENTER, WHICH USED TO VOTE OPPOSITION BEFORE 1974, VOTED FOR GISCARD IN 1974 BUT WHICH HAS BEEN GOING TO THE PS SINCE 1974, CAME BACK TO THE UDF. IN ADDITION, THE HIGH TURN-OUT, ESPECIALLY OLDER PEOPLE, HELPED THE MAJORITY. ON THE SECOND ROUND, THE ECOLOGISTS AND YOUNG VOTERS SPLIT ABOUT EVEN BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND LEFT, CONSIDERABLY BELOW LEFT EXPECTATIONS.

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